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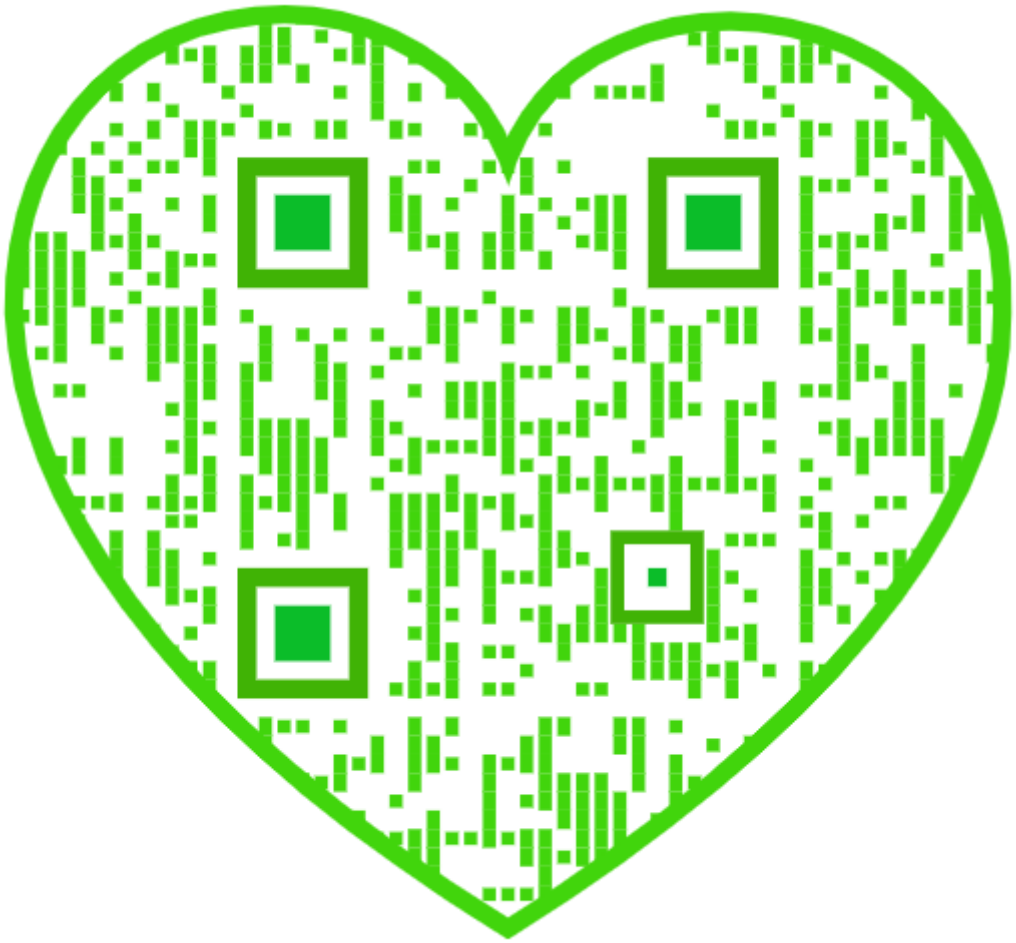

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A NORTH CAROLINA MONASTERY[1]

By J. S. Bassett

Early in the sixth century persecution in Rome drove Benedict of Nursia into exile. After some wandering he settled at Monte Casino, and drew around him a school composed of a few associates of pious inclination, severe habits, and unhesitating devotion to duty. His fame spread till he found that his school had grown to large numbers, and had attracted students from all Christendom. Out of this school grew the monastery of Monte Casino, and out of the monastery developed the order of Benedictine monks. To estimate the influence of this order would be difficult. Speaking broadly, it educated Europe. Whenever a colony of Benedictines went out among the barbarians, it became a centre from which were spread the forces of enlightenment, morality, and improved economic conditions. In conducting their enterprises their spirits were heroic. Winter blast, sterile soils, and rude society, did not deter them. To the vicissitudes of nature they opposed courage and industry; to the rudeness of men they opposed a calm, persevering, Christ-like spirit. They were well suited for the conditions they encountered. They strengthened the cause of right, protected the weak, opposed feudal robbery, and in short, during the six centuries following the establishing of the order, they exerted a generally equalizing influence over the social surface of Europe.

They fitted so well into the past that we are accustomed to imagine that they belonged there. Unless we actually stumble on their long black habits we forget that the Benedictines are still active and true to the purposes of their teacher, are continually sending out parties to found new colleges or new abbeys. The writer realized this not long ago, when he had his attention called to the Mary Help abbey, near Belmont, North Carolina.

Perhaps the conditions of such an attempt long ago would be reproduced no more exactly in any state of the Union than in North Carolina. This is without doubt the most non-Catholic state in America. Gaston county, in which Belmont is situated, is perhaps the most non-Catholic county in the state. It lies in the district of the Cape Fear and Catawba valleys, within which the Scotch colonies settled in the eighteenth century, and the inhabitants are mostly Presbyterians. At the time the enterprise began there were only eighteen hundred Catholics in the whole state.

[1] A paper read before the Historical Seminary of Johns Hopkins University, December 16, 1892.

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Agriculture in the south, conducted for the most part by negro labor, is careless and superficial. Society has not entirely emerged from the semi-feudal conditions of ante-bellum days. Taken all in all, it seemed that here was an experiment, an investigation of which would be of interest both to the historian and to the sociologist. Through the kindness of the monks, materials were easily attainable, and it was comparatively a simple task to write this sketch of the past history and present life of the abbey.

Since the days of Spanish colonization there have been Benedictine foundations in South and Central America; but not till 1842 was there one in the United States. In that year Arch-abbot Wimmer of Münich, Bavaria, founded St. Vincent's abbey in Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania. This is the parent of all the Benedictine abbeys now in this country. Among the largely Catholic population of the north and the west, the order has had great success; but for a time the south remained to them an unfallowed field.

In the year 1876 Rev. Dr. J. J. O'Connell gave for establishing a colony a plantation of five hundred acres, situated near a station on the R. & D. R.R., then known as Garibaldi, but since changed to Belmont.

So far as the natural conditions of the site are concerned, they could hardly have been better in the state. The climate is a happy medium between the cold winters of the mountains, lying fifty or more miles to the west, and the semi-tropical seasons of the Atlantic coasts just below Wilmington. The soil, of red clay mixed with sand, is capable of being made very fertile. It produces cotton, tobacco, and all the cereals. Without cultivation the farmer may reap enough native hay for his stock. Red clover grows to great advantage. All kinds of fruits abound, the section being the home of the Catawba grape. The location is very healthful. The people are, perhaps, more intelligent than average southern farmers; and as to liquor drinking, they boast that they are the most temperate in North Carolina. Briefly, the spot is well suited for intelligent, diversified farming, and the people are good neighbors.

The design of the Benedictines, when they accepted Dr. O'Connell's gift, was to erect a college to educate priests for the southern work. Accordingly, during the same year, Rev. Dr. Herman Wolfe led out the first colony, which found shelter for a while in Dr. O'Connell's house. The quiet sons of the Covenanters were surprised at the sight of the black-robed figures about their old neighbor's premises. Monks! They had never before seen one. About all they knew of such beings they had gotten from the impressive pictures of Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and from the milk-and-water stuff that is usually doled out to children by Sunday-school

libraries. North Carolina is such a strongly dissenting state, that in many rural districts even a surpliced Episcopal clergyman is an object of interest. Imagine, then, the feelings of these good people when they found themselves face to face with real, living monks.

The Benedictines, however, settled down to their work at once. With seven or eight boys, whom they gathered with much effort, the teachers began the routine work of what had been called "Saint Mary's college." The lay brothers went to their tasks in kitchen, workshop, and field, and wherever the care of the farm took them. The neighbors found them affable, self-contained, industrious, and strictly honest in business affairs. If there was but little communication, there was respect and no ill-will on either side.

The first work of Dr. Wolfe was erecting a college building. He soon had ready a two-story frame house. Four years later a three-story brick building, seventy-five by thirty-five feet, was constructed for the college, and the monks used the wooden structure for their quarters.

Nine years passed, and the number of students increased from eight to sixteen or twenty. The mother abbey had such demands from the north and the west that the work in North Carolina was not pushed very energetically. Brothers looked on Saint Mary's as almost a place of exile. Failure stared the young college in the face. Arch-abbot Wimmer, realizing that something must be done to prevent dissolution, applied to Rome to have Saint Mary's erected into an independent abbey. The request was granted, and the new abbey was called Mary Help.

After much effort a small band of volunteers was secured, who agreed to go south and take the new work in hand. On July 14, 1885, these assembled in the chapter house of Saint Vincent's to elect an abbot. This election must be held in strict accord with canon law, and the utmost secrecy must be observed. The unanimous choice fell on Rev. Leo Haid, secretary, chaplain, and professor at Saint Vincent's. A better man for the place it would have been hard to find. He is well known in Catholic circles as an orator, and his success with Mary Help abbey has been remarkable.

By the fall opening the sixteen students had increased to forty-five. To-day, seven years later, it is over a hundred. Plans were made for a new college building to be erected in parts. In 1887 the east wing, seventy-five by sixty feet, was completed. It is of brick, three stories high, with a basement. In 1888 the central building, fifty-four by sixty feet, was put up. The west wing, of the same size as the east wing, remains to be built. In 1891 they added one hundred and twenty feet to the old college building, and now use it for an abbey. At the present time they are building

an abbey church. It is to be a handsome Gothic structure, one hundred and fifteen by fifty-four feet.

Besides, Mary Help has become a mother abbey. In 1887 Abbot Haid erected a high school in Richmond, Virginia. In 1891 he opened Saint Leo's military college at Clear Lake, Florida. The buildings of the latter are ample, and the institution is said to be in a flourishing condition.

In 1888 Abbot Haid was consecrated bishop of Messene and vicar apostolic of North Carolina. He refused to resign his abbatial position, and by a special arrangement, common in ancient times, but never before employed in the United States, he was allowed to fulfill his new duties and still to retain his office as abbot.

In casting up the general statistics of the abbey at the end of the seventh year of its existence, it is seen that the membership has increased from four priests, four sub-deacons, two clerics, and four lay brothers in 1885, to seventeen priests, two deacons, six clerics, three novices, twenty-two lay brothers, and eighteen lay novices and candidates in 1892; that is to say, a growth from fourteen to sixty-eight. Moreover, two hundred and fourteen acres of land have been added to the original farm, thus making seven hundred and fourteen acres in one tract.

The condition of the farm is much better than it was originally. Land has been improved by careful and studied cultivation, and blooded stock has been gradually introduced. All supplies needed have been raised by the monks. In the winter of 1885–86, with four cows and two horses to keep, the abbot had to buy hay; now he has feed in abundance for his thirty head of cattle and seven horses. The system of agriculture is the most modern, and the farm has become a model for the neighbors. A large orchard furnishes fruit for home consumption, with a small amount for sale, while the abbey vineyard furnishes wine for table use and for sacramental purposes. Incidentally, it may be remarked that land in the immediate vicinity has increased in value during the last eight years from eight or ten dollars to twenty-five or thirty dollars an acre.

It is undoubtedly a fact that the abbey is becoming very wealthy. It is equally true, I am informed, that it is all through the efforts of the monks themselves. They have received no outside aid. While individual farmers have become poor, they have become wealthy; and this while educating without charge their own candidates and many other students.

The cause lies in two facts: (1) The organization of the labor forces of the abbey, and (2) the manner of life of the monks themselves.

Monasticism is the purest type of communism. All property is held in common. A monk can neither give nor receive anything without the

consent of the abbot. Whatever he produces goes into the common store; whatever he needs for his simple wants he gets from this store through the procurator. The saving is great. The abbot has control of all expenditure. He also directs the entire life of the members of the order. He assigns each one his work according to what he thinks is his most profitable adaptability. The member must submit. If he thinks his task is impossible, he may tell his superior so in a spirit of gentleness and patience; but if the abbot still thinks that he should do the work, then the disciple must yield, and no more objection is allowed.

Although the abbot is elected as in a perfect democracy, he holds power almost as if he were an autocrat. He is largely independent of higher authority, and to him every monk is responsible for the correct performance of his duty. He is head farmer, head teacher—supreme over each department. He thinks out the plans of the monastery; he directs their execution. Bishop Haid is professor of moral theology in the college, and works as the other teachers. He may often, when other duties allow, be seen in the fields working with the lay brothers.

The routine life of the monks, just as it was a dozen or more centuries ago, is severe and simple. They arise at 3.45 o'clock, at the summons of the abbey bell, spend two hours in prayer and meditation, partake of a slight breakfast, and then go about their daily tasks. Study, rest, and recreation are duly provided for. At 9 o'clock in the evening all retire. The religious motive drives away rivalry and discontent. Each one works from a sense of religious duty. The abbot says they do not need watching; he always knows they are doing their duty.

The health of the community is excellent. If we except attendance due to accidents from the use of machinery, the physicians' fees do not reach ten dollars a year. There are some persons at hard work at the advanced age of seventy-five or seventy-eight years. From the monks' standpoint the abbey is represented as a delightful place to live in.

Monasticism as compared with communism has one decided advantage: No man is born a monk. It has been the fate of the attempts in the past to establish societies on the communistic basis, that as soon as the original members have been replaced by a younger generation, their own children for the most part, the project has failed. Taking the vows of monastic life is a thing of choice, and is backed by the strongest religious motives. Monasticism looks to earnest conviction for its continued existence; communism must rely on the fortuitous circumstances of birth.

BAYARD TAYLOR

By The Editor

Many interesting and pleasant memories are associated with the name of one who has a just claim to what Halleck happily called

> "That frailer thing than leaf or flower,
> A poet's immortality;"

—whose brief and brilliant career, "the truly American story of a grand, cheerful, active, self-developing, self-sustaining life, remains as an enduring inheritance for all coming generations."

Bayard Taylor, journalist, traveler, poet, critic, novelist, and lecturer, was born in Kennett Square, the name of a pleasant and pretty rural village in Chester county, Pennsylvania, January 11, 1825. He was descended from a Quaker family, and breathed from the first a moral atmosphere as pure and healthful as the mountain air in which his infancy was cradled. His entrance upon active life was as an apprentice in a printing office, where he began to learn the trade at the age of seventeen, receiving a new impulse to his imperfect studies, and in some sense supplying the defects of his early education. In *Graham's Magazine* for May, 1843, there is a poem of his, entitled "Modern Greece," signed J. B. Taylor, and another in August, 1844, called "The Nameless Bird." In the following year he ceased to use his first name of James, and began to call himself J. Bayard Taylor, which he had seldom done before, and under that arrangement of his patronymic appeared in the same magazine as the author of "Night on the Deep" and "The Poet's Ambition." By this time the promise of his life had been recognized by several Philadelphians, who kindly advanced the young writer the necessary means to enable him to visit Europe, and he com-

Bayard Taylor

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Statement for the year ending December 31st, 1891.

Assets,	$159,507,138 68

Reserve on Policies (American Table 4%)		$146,968,322 00
Liabilities other than Reserve,		507,849 52
Surplus,		12,030,967 16
Receipts from all sources,		37,634,734 53
Payments to Policy-Holders,		18,755,711 86
Risks assumed and renewed,	194,470 policies,	607,171,801 00
Risks in force,	225,507 policies, amounting to	695,753,461 03

NOTE.—The above statement shows a large increase over the business of 1890 in amount at risk, new business assumed, payments to policy-holders, receipts, assets and surplus ; and includes as risks assumed only the number and amount of policies actually issued and paid for in the accounts of the year.

THE ASSETS ARE INVESTED AS FOLLOWS:

Real Estate and Bond & Mortgage Loans,	$81,345,540 48
United States Bonds and other Securities,	57,661,455 78
Loans on Collateral Securities,	10,223,903 90
Cash in Banks and Trust Companies at interest,	5,070,153 03
Interest accrued, Premiums deferred, etc.,	5,206,085 49
	$159,507,138 68

I have carefully examined the foregoing statement and find the same to be correct.

A. N. WATERHOUSE, *Auditor.*

From the Surplus a dividend will be apportioned as usual.

REPORT OF THE EXAMINING COMMITTEE.

OFFICE OF THE MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY OF NEW YORK.

January 25, 1892.

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of this Company, held on the 23d day of December, ultimo, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to examine the annual statement for the year ending December 31, 1891, and to verify the same by comparison with the assets of the Company.

The Committee have carefully performed the duty assigned to them, and hereby certify that the statement is in all particulars correct, and that the assets specified therein are in possession of the Company.

In making this certificate the Committee bear testimony to the high character of the investments of the Company and express their approbation of the system, order, and accuracy with which the accounts and vouchers have been kept, and the business in general is transacted.

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